The Future Waters

773 The order of the universe prevails in space and time: the present order of things is but one phase thereof. When the "first running waters" covered the ground, Faro permitted only the primordial water to spread out; twelve waters remained hidden and they will rush forth and submerge the earth when he gives the order. The words they contain will be revealed and the "world to come" as thought out by yo will be realized.

Meanwhile, in the expectation of these "future waters," men must provide themselves with objects that will save them; the Bozo and some Bambara have canoes, shepherds have their gourds, spinners their spindles, and women their wooden stools (1). The coming /31/

[192] 1. It is significant that kuru (canoe), kuruni (spindle), and kuruni (stool) come from the same root. The word kuru designates the original globule in which Pemba descended, and which later became the wood pembele in the shape of a trough; it also designates the case or ark used by the mythical blacksmith, bearer of the nutritive [171] seeds. See p. 53, n. 1. The word kuru should be compared to koro which, in the Dogon language, has the general meaning of case, box, wooden receptacle, trough and canoe, and which also designates, among these people, the vessel in which the blacksmith descended. See M. Griaule. L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes, p. 117, n. 3.

of the waters is represented by a drawing on these objects as well as on a number of other everyday tools (Fig. 3).

773 524 This drawing serves as the framework for a game, the sumangolo, which the Bambara of all ages and both sexes play in order to "contribute to the progress of the world."

This game bears the name of the ancestor Soumangolo who traveled throughout the universe to find out and reveal to men "the

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location and disposition of the waters" (dyi walew and dyi kono few). During his voyage, "he was unable to reach the central springs of the sky, " and that is why they have remained unknown to men. /32/ But he visited "the waters of the cardinal angles" from which there emanates a vapor that determines the seasons and the temperatures. Then he studied "the waters of the cardinal sides" and asked Faro to let them

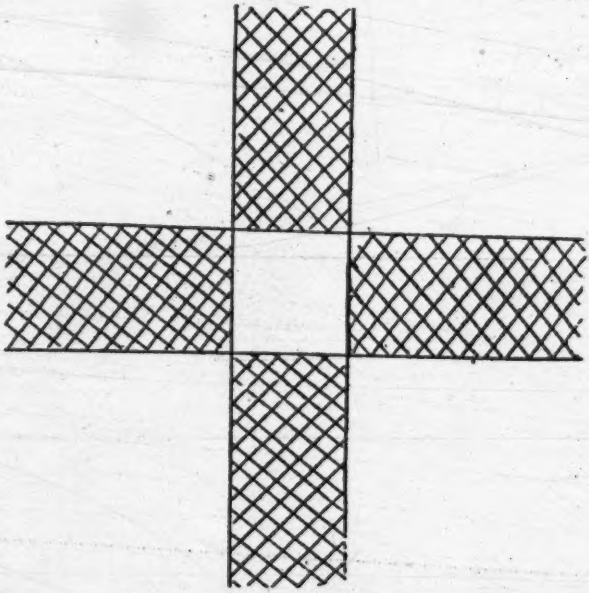

Fig. 3. —The arrival of the "twelve future waters." The central square represents the world and its four cardinal points, the arms of the cross, and the expansion of the waters. This drawing is made on a great number of objects and tools.

stream over the earth. He crossed them in order to explore them and instruct men about them. It is said: "Soumangolo of creation has shown to people and things the ponds, rivers and old ponds." (1).

1. Dali sumangolo ye ko, ba, ko koro kono ko dyira ma ni few la.

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524 The game consists in the player crossing the three waters that come from each of the cardinal sides. (1) The drawing represents /33/

1. See Fig. 4. This figure is drawn on the ground: the central square represents the universe and the branches of the cross are the waters emanating from the cardinal sides and divided within each group into three parts.

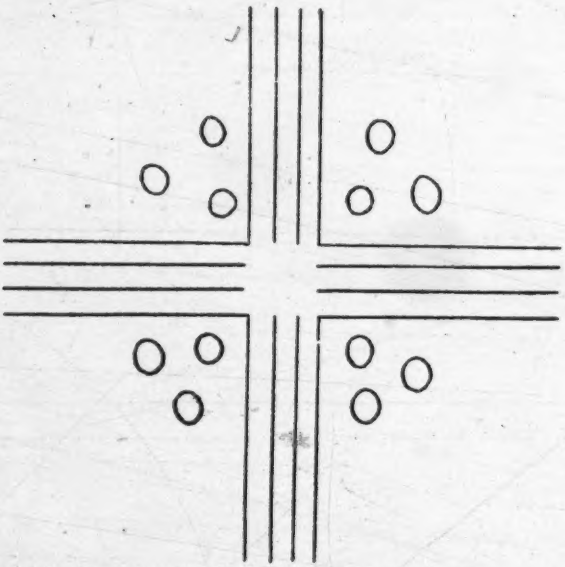

Fig. 4.—Game of the sumangolo, symbolizing the "arrival of the twelve future waters."

Three or four pebbles, depending on the sex of the player, are placed in the angles.

The player turns his back on the drawing and sings: "The little man has left the dance; the little man, the bad man has left the dance; another has not danced; may the difficulty of the water cease (tyeni bwora do la; tyeni, tyendyugu bwora do la; tye were te do ke nin kelenko; dyi geleya ka ta). He then names the three parts of water in the branch of the cross, while his partner

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points them out successively with his finger, saying: "cross the pond" (ko tike sumangolo), "cross the river" (ba tike sumangolo), "Soumangolo's descent is over" (sumangolo yigi bana). The partner removes the pebble immediately adjacent to the branch pointed to and asks: "Is this it?" (nin wa?). The player must answer: "Yes! Soumangolo." The game is again taken up in the same way at the starting point. When the onlooker places his finger on the now empty space, he asks: "Is this it?". The player must answer: "No! Soumangolo." The second pebble is removed and, to the same question, the player must then answer: "Yes! Soumangolo." Then follows the same chant, the same mimicry to get at the third pebble, which is also removed. The game is started over again in the same way, at the same starting point, and the second branch of the cross is reached. This continues until the four groups of pebbles placed in the angles are eliminated. The player who has answered without making a mistake is the winner; supposedly he has victoriously crossed "the twelve future waters."

The immediate effect of this game is to place the winner in a favorable position: his earnings increase; his enterprises succeed. But this is not all: it represents a cosmogonic operation of a high order. In the old days, sumangolo was played to bring about rain in times of drought; every person playing it today contributes to the actual functioning of the universe as well as to the realization of future times awaited by men. In certain villages the ancestor Soumangolo is celebrated yearly by a hearty feast at which millet beer is drunk and all day long the villagers play the game bearing his name.

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The sumangolo is part of a series of figures, sometimes geometrical, which serve as the base for cosmogonic games of semi-ritual character such as the one described above.

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[524] both the waters that flowed over the earth in the past and those that will spread over the world when Faro orders them (Fig. 4).

While awaiting that day, Faro continues his work. Taking the spiral route originally followed at the time of the reorganization of the world, every four centuries he travels about, inspecting the confines of the world, and then returns to the central point whence he surveys and governs the universe.

Chapter 2

The Representations

776 /34/ The duality of glã, in the microcosm that is man by his twin souls (ni and dya), is projected into the universe in the form of the pair, sky-earth, originally formed by the splitting of the spirit in two. The pair is represented by two supernatural powers, Faro and Pemba, to whom the principal Bambara cults are addressed.

Pemba is both spirit, strength, and matter. He is actually represented by an engraved piece of wood, symbol of plank originally responsible for the creation of all living things on earth. Theoretically, each family has one.

Faro, master of the word, reigns both in the sky and in the waters, which are the earthly reflection of the sky. In his capacity as master of the word and reorganizer of the universe, custodian of life, and guardian of souls, Faro, light and vibration, reigns in the seventh heaven. As master of the waters, he is described by the Bambara as a living being who has a body and is subject to metamorphosis. Yet to the initiated, he remains first and foremost a higher spirit, detached from contingencies and free in the exercise of the sovereign power conferred on him.

In order to understand fully the spirit of the Bambara religion, it is necessary to examine all the representations of these powers (1).

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114 1. A few authors have summarily described Faro, in particular, L. Tauxier in Religion bambara (pp. 142-145), in